AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF MINIMUM GIFT AMOUNT FOR ATHLETIC FUNDRAISING ORGANIZATIONS IN NCAA DIVISION I

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ABSTRACT

Ashley A. Kavanagh: An Empirical Analysis of Minimum Gift Amount for Athletic Fundraising Organizations in NCAA Division I
(Under the direction of Nels Popp)

NCAA Division I college athletics departments are under pressure to generate greater revenue through donations, yet research related to strategic pricing structures of giving levels is underdeveloped. Tier rewards systems are a strategy designed to encourage donors to give specified amounts in exchange for benefits, such as access to football tickets and parking. The quantity and economic value of the incentives increase the more that a donor gives. The purpose of this study is to examine the lowest tier giving level to determine: (a) the characteristics of this level and (b) to determine the relationship between key variables and both the minimum giving amount and number of donors at that level. Hierarchical regression was used to determine this relationship for athletic annual funds in Division I (n=128). The number of donors at the lowest giving tier was the dependent variable, while the minimum gift for membership served as the key independent variable. All other factors will serve as control variables in the model. Results of the study suggest the number of full-time development staff, minimum gift amount at the lowest tier, and maximum gift amount at the lowest tier are statistically significant.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DI	NCAA Division I
FBS	Football Bowl Subdivision, which is the highest level of college football in the NCAA Division I.
FCS	Football Championships Subdivision, which is the second highest level of college football in the NCAA Division I.
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
RQ	Research Question
SEC	Southeastern Conference

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Now more than ever, colleges need money. Athletics departments are having to become more self-sufficient as institutions are getting less help from state entities. Overall state funding for both two-year and four-year colleges was almost $9 billion below the levels during the Great Recession in 2008—after adjusting for inflation (Mitchell, Leachman & Masterson, 2017). Due to this, many colleges and universities have faced severe budget constraints, leading to a growing expectation for intercollegiate athletic departments to become more self-sufficient. Yet, only about 10% of public institutions in the NCAA Division I FBS have been able to generate revenue equal to or above their total annual expenses (Berkowitz & Schnaars, 2017).

The main sources of revenue within college athletics, particularly at the Division I FBS level are fundraising revenue, football ticket sales, basketball ticket sales, conference distribution, and NCAA distributions (Fulks, 2016). In a 2014 report, Fulks reported that cash contributions ranked third for FBS programs, and second at the FCS level. Two years later in the 2016 Division I Intercollegiate Athletics Programs Report on Revenues and Expenses, Fulks (2017) identified 'cash contributions from alumni and others' as the top generated revenue item for both Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) programs, ahead of ticket sales and broadcast rights fees. This demonstrates that the reliance on cash contributions is increasing annually. For Division I FBS athletic programs in the top quartile of expenses, fundraising revenue annually accounts for $26.72 million of department

revenue (Fulks, 2016; Wanless, Martinez, Lawrence-Benedict & Kopka, 2017; Wolverton & Kambhampati, 2016).

While departments are raising more money each year, they are still facing roadblocks on their way to self-sufficiency. Athletic expenditures have increased drastically over time in what is popularly known in the "arms race" in collegiate athletics (Morales, 2016). Departments have invested millions of dollars in efforts to acquire world class facilities and resources to attract the best coaches, personnel, and recruits (Newlon, 2014). In addition, there has been a general decline in gameday attendance (Dodd, 2018). The average per game home game attendance during the 2019 home football season was 765 people fewer than 2018 (NCAA Research, 2019; NCAA Research, 2018). A decrease in gameday attendance results in lower ticker revenue, causing financial challenges for many departments across the nation. Further illustrating the need for examining fundraising strategies, athletic departments are most recently facing changes in U.S tax code policy (Smith, 2017). The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act took effect on January 1, 2018, which took away the ability for donors to receive up to 80% tax deductions for season ticket-related donations. Most major athletic departments tied giving to the ability to purchase football and basketball tickets due to this loophole (Smith, 2017). The House Ways and Means Committee projects that the government will net $200 million per year from this adjustment, while universities had to find creative ways to restructure their giving. While not a major motivator for giving, favorable tax implications have historically been an important consideration when assessing athletic donor motivation (Ko, Rhee, Walker, & Lee, 2014; Park, Ko, Kim, & Sagas, 2016; Staurowsky, Parkhouse, & Sachs, 1996).

Giving levels tied to benefits are common among Division I FBS athletic departments. Donors are often given "premiere access" to parking and tickets when their donation reaches a

specified amount. The need to increase annual contribution revenue is evident, but there is not currently any published research that examines and evaluates giving levels or the program impacts if they are increased. This results in a gap in fundraising literature. Most fundraising research has focused on donor behavior, donor retention, and donor motivations (Gladden, Mahony & Apostolopoulou, 2005; Mahony, Gladden & Funk, 2003; Park, Ko, Kim, Sagas & Eddosary, 2016; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011; Stinson & Howard, 2004; Stinson & Howard, 2010; Tsiotsou, 1998; Verner, Hecht & Fransler, 1998). Research related to examining the pricing of giving levels can assist practitioners in better understanding how to improve fundraising strategies, offsetting the rising expenses in college athletics.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the characteristics of the lowest donation level for all Division I schools with tiered giving systems?

RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between number of donors at the lowest tier and conference affiliation, institutional factors, and athletic performance?

RQ3: Is there a significant relationship between number of donors at the lowest tier and minimum gift amount, maximum gift required at the lowest tier, and number of development staff?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Frameworks to Study Donor Motivation

Researchers have been analyzing fundraising within collegiate athletic departments for decades, as well as its place in overall institutional giving (Park et al., 2016). Primarily, they found much to learn about donor motivation, or the underlying factors propelling an individual to give (Ko, et al., 2014). Over the last 30 years, many researchers have considered the factors influencing donor motivation and have developed methods to accomplish this task.

The Athletics Contributions Questionnaire (ACQ) was developed in 1985 by Billing, Holt, and Smith to identify potential donor motivations such as philanthropic, social, success, and tangible benefits. Staurowsky, Parkhouse and Sachs (1996) built off this framework to create the Athletics Contribution Questionnaire Revised Edition II (ACQUIRE II), which added "curiosity" and "power" as motives. In this model, "curiosity" is derived from the donor's interest in athletics and needs related with athletics, while "power" is considered "donating in order to obtain influence within athletic department operations" (Gladden et al., 2005). Factor analysis later demonstrated factors related to curiosity were unnecessary to include, while success factors were expanded. They created "success I" relating to the achievement of the college or university, and "success II" relating to past college athletic participation and the influence the athletic department has on the state (Gladden et al., 2005).

To expand the literature even further, the Motivation of Athletic Donors (MAD-I) was created (Verner et al., 1998). This model incorporated 11 donor motivations that were distinctive from prior research: (a) participation in secondary events, (b) public recognition, (c) giving of time and energy, (d) inside information, (e) priority treatment, (f) philanthropy, (g) collaboration, (h) create, (i) change, (j) curiosity, (k) and power (Verner et al., 1998). Respectively, these factors can be explained by donors' desire to receive access to events exclusive to donors, receive public recognition from the organization, become engaged beyond simply making financial contributions, obtain information not given to non-donors, receive special benefits, promote good will and assist in the education of student-athletes, work with others toward a common goal, bring new change in the athletic department, improve or modify something, consult with athletic staff personnel, and influence athletic department operations. Each of these factors were statistically significant, explaining a sufficient level of variation in underlying donor motivations. The level of explained variance for each independent variable ranged from 2% to 74%, and averaged about 29% for each variable (Verner et al., 1998).

Ko, Rhee, Walker, and Lee (2014) created the Model for Athletic Donor Motivation (MADOM). This model took existing motivational factors in athletics giving and combined them with an established psychological framework used to understand human behavior. The existence, relatedness, and growth theory was established by Alderfer (1969) to overcome limitations of previous models. This model sorted human needs into three categories: existence needs are material needs for wellbeing, relatedness are needs related to a sense of belonging, and growth needs are the desire for personal development opportunities (Park et al., 2016). Ko et al. (2014) sorted eight unique factors into the three needs categories. Philanthropy, vicarious achievement and display of commitment were defined as growth needs. Affiliation and social interaction were

defined as relatedness needs. Existence needs included public recognition, power, and tangible benefits. Based on this research by Ko et al., Park et al. concluded that donors give to organizations where they feel personally engaged.

Factors that Impact Donor Giving

While it is evident through decades of scholarship that intercollegiate athletics plays an important role in institutional giving across American Universities, whether team success impacts giving has been inconclusive. An early study analyzed school endowments and found evidence schools with an emphasis towards football saw a smaller growth rate in their endowments than schools without an emphasis on football (Cohen, Whisenant, & Walsh, 2010). However, other studies demonstrate a possible positive relationship between football team success and athletic giving. In their meta-analysis of intercollegiate athletics and institutional fundraising, Martinez, Stinson, Kang, and Jubenville (2010) found intercollegiate athletics does have a positive effect on overall giving. They examined all empirical studies on this topic between 1976 and 2008. They also found football success has a stronger influence on donor giving than any other sport by nearly 60%. In their 2008 study, Howard and Stinson indicated a school's most prominent sport has the largest influence on giving. In most cases that sport is football, but when not offered, donors are more influenced by men's basketball success. Schools which made an appearance in the NCAA men's basketball tournament saw a $400 increase in average total gift and an appearance in the football playoffs saw a 10% increase in the number of alumni donors (Howard and Stinson, 2008). Other studies have found a positive relationship exists between sport success and donations to athletics, supporting Howard and Stinson's findings (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Daughtrey & Stotlar, 2000; Grimes & Chressanthis, 1994; Sigelman & Bookheimer, 1983).

Studies have looked into what factors impact annual giving to booster programs, in addition to team success. In a 2001 study, Wells identified 15 potential predictor variables related to annual fund contributions. These predictor variables were divided into four categories: institutional characteristics, demographic characteristics, organizational fund-raising characteristics, and institutional athletic success characteristics. Institutional characteristics included the institution's total number of living alumni and the type of institution. Demographic characteristics included state population, state median per capita personal income, and the number of schools that participated in college athletics in the state. Organizational fund-raising characteristics included the following variables: (a) total number of years the institution had designated a full-time fund-raising position; (b) continuous number of years the institution had conducted an annual fund-raising program; (c) the Director of Development's total number of years' experience in the field of fund raising; (d) the total number of part-time paid staff members that worked on the athletic department's annual fund-raising program; (e) the size of the athletic department's prospective donor list; and (f) the total number of volunteers utilized during the athletic department's annual fund-raising program. Lastly, institutional athletic success characteristics were defined as (a) accumulated percentage of stadium capacity for football attendance; (b) season football ticket sales; (c) previous year football win/loss percentage; and (d) appearance in a bowl game at the end of the prior football season. He surveyed 70 development offices at the Division I level. Five of these factors proved to be statistically significant: number of years of experience of the development director, number of years full-time fund raising position was established, season football ticket sales, total number of living alumni, and size of prospective donor list. From these findings, Wells developed an equation to estimate schools' annual fund revenues.

McEvoy (2005) created a model to predict annual fundraising contributions to NCAA FBS athletic programs. He based his research on studies from Sigelman and Brookheim (1983) and Coughlin and Erekson (1984, 1985), feeling that these needed an update in the changing landscape of collegiate athletics. In his study, he examined the following variables: football and men's basketball winning percentages for the year examined, the change in football and men's basketball winning percentages from the previous year, average home attendance for football and men's basketball in the year examined, whether the school is a member of a "major" athletic conference, whether the school is a public or private institution, state population, as well as four categorical variables to control for fixed-effects in the time-series regression analysis. He sent his survey to all 119 FBS schools, receiving 35 responses. The overall model was a statistically significant estimator of annual fundraising contributions and McEvoy's findings supported those of the previous works, specifically Coughlin and Erekson. Five of the 13 independent variables were significantly related. Football home attendance and conference affiliation had the strongest influence on annual athletic contributions, followed by football winning percentage, type of institution, and men's basketball home attendance.

Transactional Giving

People give to satisfy their personal needs and to demonstrate their attachment to an organization. When there is a genuine cost to the donor, giving is often driven more by self-interest than true altruism (Jardine, 2003; Brady, Noble, Utter, & Smith, 2002; Neuberg, Cialdini, Brown, Luce, Sagarin & Lewis, 1997). Donors who give for the sole purpose of receiving tangible benefits are identified as transaction-motivated. When comparing donations in collegiate athletics to that of other nonprofit organizations, donors in this space tend to be more transaction-motivated. While studies have found that donors are also motivated by a desire to

improve the quality of athletics and the opportunity to help student-athletes (Gladden et al., 2005), others have cited tax-deduction incentives and ticket-related benefits as well. Donor motivations for this group might include tangible benefits such as priority seating and parking privileges (Isherwood, 1986).

Stinson and Howard (2010) suggest both transactional and altruistic motivations may be present for intercollegiate athletics donors, with altruistic motivations developing later on in the giving life-cycle. According to past researchers, the highest motivator among athletic donors was reported to be ticket-related benefits (Mahoney et al., 2003; Wells et al., 2005), but in their analysis of open-ended responses of donors across three college athletic programs, Gladden et al., (2005) found 61.8% of donors cited 'support and improve the athletic program' as a motivator for giving, with 49.8% identifying 'ticket-oriented' benefits. Park's 2016 study was one of the first to provide insight on individual donor motivations among different contribution levels (Park et al., 2016). Tangible benefits were the highest rated motive within the high contribution group, and the second highest rated motive for the low contribution group. The tangible benefits that come from making the donations (i.e. access to parking, season tickets, etc.) were more of a priority to donors than the intrinsic benefits of charitable giving (Park et al., 2016).

Transactional giving has become prevalent in crowdfunding initiatives, in and out of college athletics. Satter, Morehead, Popp, and McEvoy (2019) interviewed eleven fundraisers in collegiate athletics to identify themes that make successful crowdfunding campaigns. Donor incentives was one of the main five themes that appeared. More often at the Power 5 level, rewards-based crowdfunding is used. This method is transactional, with contributors expecting to receive some type of 'reward' in exchange for their donation. Successful campaigns have

provided “tangible things that also are unique, one-time opportunities” such as pieces of the facility or game-worn equipment.

Tiered Reward Systems

Transactional giving often goes hand in hand with tiered reward systems. Many crowdfunding campaigns utilize tiered rewards as they play an important role in their success. While some research showed a higher number of tiers can be linked to success (Mollick & Nanda, 2016), Chen et. al (2016) found that fewer, more meaningful reward tiers lead to better campaign results. Data from Kickstarter, a prominent crowdfunding platform, as of September 2015 showed that campaigns had eleven reward tiers on average, but the researchers found campaigns with six-tiered reward levels met the highest percentage of their fundraising goals (Kaartemo, 2017).

Tiered giving levels are prevalent in industries like hotels and airlines. A primary motive for businesses or organizations to structure their tiered reward levels is to incentivize each member to donate or purchase more so they can receive the benefits provided in higher tiered reward levels (Tanford, 2013). For example, the Marriott Rewards program is divided into four different membership levels—Basic Member, Silver Elite, Gold Elite, and Platinum Elite. Basic members do not receive incentives, while Platinum Elite members receive free room upgrades and priority check-in (Marriott Rewards Membership, 2018). In addition to bringing in more revenue, tiered reward levels can lead to brand commitment among members because it establishes a sense of identity within each tiered reward level (McCall & Voorhees, 2010). American Airlines developed their customer loyalty program in 1981 to focus more on relationship-based transactions. In a 2013 study, Tanford investigated the influence of reward tier on key loyalty indicators in hospitality. the study indicated members of the highest level of a

hotel rewards program spend 78% of total nights staying in a hotel at the preferred member hotel brand.

Effects of Tiered Pricing on Purchases

Price plays an important role in consumers' evaluation of a product, as it often can be considered a cue to product quality. In a Danish study, Marian et al. (2014) looked at the impacts of price levels on the purchase of organic foods. Prior research shows that consumers are willing to accept a price premium up to a certain point because they have higher quality expectations for organic products than that of conventional alternatives. In the conventional product market, products in the high price tier have the highest repeat purchase rate because price is an indicator of quality. High priced food products are considered a niche product in all categories. Consumers who buy niche products are less price sensitive and generally deal resistant (Rungie & Laurent, 2012). Within this niche product market, consumers are more likely to remain loyal to their preferred brands. Loyal consumers of organic foods are willing to pay more because the higher quality is a perceived benefit.

Paying the different prices for the same product is highly prevalent in the airline industry. Airlines use dynamic pricing models, where the prices vary significantly based on numerous factors. They tend to charge high prices to passengers who purchase tickets close to their date of travel, capitalizing on the expiratory nature of flights. In addition to paying premiums for convenience, customers are willing to pay for the benefits they receive at different price points. Lufthansa, a European airline, classifies travel fares into Basic Economy, Basic Plus, Premium Economy, and Business. Within these levels, airlines use different fences to screen their consumers. There are "perks" associated with paying more, including but not limited to free checked baggage, refund availability, cabin options, and seat selection (Helmold, 2020).

Price tiers are used in ticketing for the sport and entertainment industry, where location and quality of the seats determine the price tiers. A common practice is charging higher prices for seats closer to the field of play. In a 2013 study, Reese and Kerr look at the relationship between ticket price and fan expectations. Spectators chose tickets for the same event at different price levels, according to their perceived value. Consumers' price perceptions can directly influence perceived quality (Rao, 2005), and value (Zeithaml, 1988). When ticket purchasers determine their alternatives, they use their prior experiences at the event to make judgements about their selected price tier. By understanding how these tiers influence consumers' value assessments, firms are better able to develop appropriate price tiers, and in turn encourage purchase behavior. Tiered pricing has demonstrated impact purchasing decisions in many industries from organic foods to event tickets. Consumers are willing to pay higher prices for the same product when they believe their perceived value is higher.

Philanthropic Tiered Rewards

Reward tiers are used in philanthropic giving in many industries. Harbaugh (1998) highlights that the intention of a tier structure is to create an implicit "prestige" among donors. Research by Dreze and Nines (2009) found some members in higher tiered reward levels have been known to feel a sense of superiority over members in lower tiered reward levels. This feeling of exclusivity associated with donating to reach or remain in high tiered reward levels has allowed for organizations and businesses to capitalize on donation revenue (McCardle, Rajaram & Tang, 2009). In a 2009 study, McCardle analyzed donation patterns at a Catholic high school in Delaware. The data showed that more donors will give the exact minimum necessary for the next highest tier, and almost no donations that were close but below the maximum for that giving level (McCardle, 2009). Using these observations, they designed a tool to analyze the impact of

tiered giving on total donations. This research ultimately suggested that, if a donor's original contribution level is close to the minimum of the next donation level tier, then they are typically willing to donate enough money to qualify for that next tier. The study also indicates that there are not sufficient findings that show that donors are willing to decrease their gift by a few dollars to drop down a donation level (McCardle et al., 2009).

Unpublished Research into Tiered Giving in Intercollegiate Athletics

This study builds on two prior graduate theses at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Lipsey et. al. (2021) analyzed tiered giving levels at FBS institutions from a very high level to understand the trends in number of tiers and pricing strategies. It looks at the descriptives for the minimum gift amount but does not include number of donors and real-time data was not collected. Watson (2020) studied the minimum gift requirement at the maximum giving tier for FBS schools. The current study takes a similar approach but to lowest giving tier. The goal of this analysis is to expand beyond the results of the first two to develop generalizable information by examining the relationship between minimum gift amount and actual number of donors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between minimum gift amount for membership and the number of donors at the lowest donation tier. Limited research has been conducted in this area, and this topic is of relevance and importance to the sport industry due to the ever-increasing importance placed on revenue generation in Division I athletics today. Tiered giving levels have been prevalent in college athletics for years but have not been fully adopted across the country. Some universities, like Jacksonville University, do not have a tiered giving system in place while others, like North Carolina State University, had not adjusted their

donation levels for fifteen years despite market changes (Jacksonville University, 2021; Wolfpack Club, 2021). The researchers guess that majority of donors give at the lowest tier; therefore, it may serve athletic departments well to better understand the analyze the impacts increases in donation amounts may have on the number of donors in their organization.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The population for the current study was all NCAA Division I athletic departments. This research is a single year snapshot, with data from the 2018-2019 giving year. In total, the population is 357 schools from the thirty-two athletic conferences. Similar studies have looked specifically at Power Five or FBS schools only (Lipsey et al. 2021; Watson et al., 2020), but the researchers felt it was important to open the study up to all schools in Division I to learn more about tiered giving across a larger platform. The researchers requested data from every school that uses a tiered giving system. Private institutions were not compelled to respond to the request, so many did not provide the requested data; a noted limitation of the generalizability of the study.

The variables in this study were split into four categories (a) conference affiliation, (b) institution-related variables, (c) measures of athletic performance, and (d) development-controlled variables. The conference affiliation was attributed to general knowledge. Institution-related variables included enrollment, tuition costs, public or private status, and endowment. These were collected from US World News and univstats.com. For metrics of athletic department performance men's basketball win percentage (McEvoy, C. 2005), and 2018 Director's Cup rankings (Watson, S. 2020) were selected based on prior research. All-time winning percentages collected from the NCAA at stats.ncaa.com. Learfield Director's Cup ranking was collected from the National Association of College Directors of Athletics website at

nacda.com. The development-controlled variables were minimum gift amount, maximum gift amount at the lowest tier, number of donors at the lowest tier, and number of development staff in the organization. Giving level and staffing data were collected from the schools' fundraising organization websites. Giving level data was also collected from fundraisers themselves. The researcher contacted fundraisers at every institution to find out how many donors the institution had at their lowest giving level, as well as the total number of donors to their organization.

To address RQ1, the statistical software program SPSS, was used to analyze the descriptive statistics of the minimum donation level for all Division I schools with tiered giving systems for the sample set. All measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) and all measures of variance (range, standard deviation, variance) were recorded and examined. In addition to the dollar amount, researchers examined the benefits received at the lowest giving level to determine trends in benefits across all Division I institutions.

SPSS was used to run a hierarchical regression analysis to address RQ2 and RQ3. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis indicate whether the variables have a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable. RQ2 focused on the variables in the first three models of the hierarchical regression: (a) conference affiliation, (b) institution-related variables, and (c) measures of athletic performance. To address RQ3, the last model in the hierarchical regression included variables that the development office controls. These were number of full-time development staff, minimum gift requirement for the lowest tier, and the maximum gift required at the lowest tier.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Development personnel from a total of 153 schools responded to the email request for their fundraising data, for a response rate of 42.86%. 128 of these schools were used in the study because they have annual giving programs tied to benefits. The sample represented 35.85% of the total schools in Division I. Twenty-nine of the thirty-two Division I conferences were represented in the sample. Of the institutions in the study, 39 compete at the Division I Power 5 level, 18 are Division I No Football, and 27 are private institutions. The average enrollment of the universities was 21,721 with a minimum of 1,172 and a maximum of 85,586. The mean annual tuition was $33,498, with a minimum of $8,535 and maximum $64,380. The average endowment was $1.29 billion, with a minimum of $9 million and a maximum $25.6 billion. The median endowment was $362.6 million, this is a better representation because some Ivy League and private institutions included have significantly higher endowments than the rest of the sample.

To address RQ1, the descriptive characteristics of the lowest donation level were assessed. The minimum gift requirement at the lowest donation tier for the 128 fundraising organizations in this study ranged from $0-$1,500. The mean minimum gift requirement was $94.14, with a standard deviation of 146.58. The maximum gift at the lowest tier had a range of $49-$3499, a mean of $328.26, and a standard deviation of 353.59. There was a mean of 1123.90

donors at the lowest tier, with a range of 2 to 9,000 donors. The standard deviation was 1574.79. The total number of donors at the organizations ranged from 110 to 21,196, with a mean of 4,273.68 and a standard deviation of 4827.35. The number of giving levels of these fundraising organizations range from 2 to 16, with an average of 8.17 giving levels.

Table 1

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
Donors at the Lowest Tier	1123.9	2	9000	1574.79
Total Donors	4273.68	110	21198	4827.35
Minimum Gift Requirement	94.19	0	1500	146.58
Maximum Gift at the Lowest Tier	328.26	49	3499	353.59
Number of Tiers	8.17	2	16	2.31
Number of Development Staff	7.96	1	44	8.27

Hierarchical Regression

A hierarchical procedure was used to investigate the influence of each factor. The results of the hierarchical regression are shown in the table below. To address RQ2, the hierarchal regression data for conference affiliation, institution-related factors, and measures of athletic performance were analyzed. First, a program's conference affiliation is a predictor of the variance in number of donors at the lowest giving tier. Conference affiliation explains 47.6% of of the model. The ACC (t=3.152), Big Ten (t=6.507), PAC-12 (t=2.736), and SEC (t=6.174) were all statistically significant at the α=0.05 level ($p < 0.01$). In the second model, institutional variables were added. This model explains 52.2% of total variance, with the addition of institutional variables accounting for a 4.6% change in the variance. In this group of factors, enrollment was statistically significant at the α=0.05 level (t=2.549, $p < 0.05$) while tuition costs (t=0.167), university endowment (t=1.606), and the private or public status of the university (t=0.057) were nonsignificant factors. The third model included measures of athletic performance, Director's Cup rankings and all-time men's basketball win percentage. The

addition of these variables contributed to a minimal change in variance, with a change in R-squared of 0.1%. Neither Director's Cup ranking (t=-0.411) or men's basketball win percentage (t=0.10) were statistically significant.

To address RQ3, the final model of the hierarchical regression included the main variables of interest that athletic development departments can control. These variables were analyzed while controlling for the first three variable groups. This overall model explains 73.1% of the variance in number of donors at the lowest giving tier. The development-controlled variables included number of full-time development staff (t=5.723), minimum gift requirement at the lowest tier (t=-3.267), and maximum gift requirement at the lowest tier (t=8.20). These three factors account for 20.8% of the variance in the model and all were statistically significant. The unstandardized coefficient for full-time development staff 98.503. The unstandardized coefficient for minimum gift requirement at the lowest tier was -3.944, and the unstandardized coefficient maximum gift requirement at the lowest tier is 2.238 respectively.

Table 2

Predictor Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Conference Affiliation				
ACC	.237 (3.152)**	.203 (2.673)**	.186 (2.099)*	-.046 (-.563)
Big Ten	.478 (6.507)**	.392 (5.103)**	.379 (4.504)**	.316 (4.764)**
Big 12	.100 (1.391)	.089 (1.252)	.075 (.951)	-.003 (-.056)
PAC-12	1.94 (2.736)**	.129 (1.791)	.118 (1.503)	.022 (.366)
SEC	.446 (6.174)**	.381 (5.20)**	.367 (4.480)**	.043 (.576)
Institution-Related				
Public v. Private		.005 (.057)	.008 (.104)	.009 (.142)
Enrollment		.236 (2.549)*	.104 (2.437)*	.055 (.725)
Out-of-state Tuition		.012 (.167)	.013 (.189)	.019 (.361)
Endowment		.121 (1.606)	.113 (1.433)	.096 (1.574)
Measures of Athletic Performance				
Director's Cup Ranking			-.046 (-.411)	.049 (.564)
All-time MBB Win Percentage			.001 (.010)	-.025 (-.396)
Development-Controlled Variables				
Number of Full-time Development Staff				.515 (5.723)**
Min. Gift Requirement for Lowest Tier				-.191 (-3.267)**
Max. Gift for the Lowest Tier				.500 (8.20)**
F-statistics	15.205**	11.235**	9.366**	18.329**
R^2	0.476	0.522	0.523	0.731
ΔR^2	0.476	0.046	0.001	0.208

Note: Standardized coefficients reported (β); t-values in parentheses; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between minimum gift amount for membership and the number of donors at the lowest donation tiers, with a goal to determine if there was a relationship between the minimum gift amount and number of donors at that tier, as well as what additional factors are significantly related to the minimum gift amount. Most development organizations in Division I athletics use a tiered giving system. The lowest tier is the entry point for new donors, and often the level at which most of the donor base contributes. For this reason, it is important to understand what impacts giving at this amount.

When looking at current development practices, it appears that schools seem to mirror each other rather than structuring their giving tiers based on analytics. Lipsey et. al. (2021) referred to this as "memetic isomorphism" where organizations model themselves after the processes or strategies of other organizations that are perceived to be beneficial (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Of the schools sampled, 56 set their minimum gift requirements at $100, with the next most being 26 schools that are set at $50. There is no research on how to set a minimum gift amount, so schools are potentially setting these standards by assessing their peers. This applies to the number of tiers as well. As stated in Table 1, the mean number of giving tiers within the included schools is 8.17. The mode is 7 and the median is 8. If schools were basing this decision on research, Chen (2016) found that fewer, more meaningful reward tiers lead to better campaign

results. Researchers found campaigns with six-tiered reward levels met the highest percentage of their fundraising goals on crowdfunding platforms, while the average campaign had 11 levels. It appears fundraising organizations are potentially making these decisions based on examination of peer institutions. As discussed, donors within collegiate athletics are more likely to give transactionally. The benefits of donating at the lowest tier stay consistent across the included schools, supporting the "memetic isomorphism" in collegiate athletics. There was no real "unique" benefit offered. Tax deduction or priority points were offered at 58 schools. Parking incentives, whether that be complimentary parking at nonrevenue sports or early access to different lots for football and men's' basketball, were included at 45 schools. Discounts at team shops were offered 50 times. Benefits that identify membership were offered in some degree at every institution. Decals and label pins were offered at 59 institutions. Public recognition was included in 54, and exclusive newsletters were a benefit at 73 schools. These items create a sense of community, emphasizing the relatedness needs discussed by Ko et. al (2014).

The value set for the minimum gift ranged. Two schools set their minimum gift amount at $0, and 14 set it at $1. Of these 14 schools, four of them are at the Power 5 level. On the opposite end, one school has a minimum annual gift of $1,500. Number of donors also greatly varied across the tiers. The total number of donors varies from a minimum of 110 to a maximum of 21,198. This is similar among number of donors at the lowest tier. One institution reported 2 donors at the lowest giving level, while another had 9,000. There were some outliers amount the Power 5 institutions. One school has 1,329 annual fund donors, while another has 21,198. This data suggests that while institutions are setting similar prices and giving structures, there are inconsistent results. Schools should re-examine their current structure to optimize their own model to best fit their fan base, rather than make decisions based on peer institutions. In the

Power 5, one institution has only 5% of their total donors at the lowest giving level while another school has 71% of donors donating at the minimum. On average, 27% of donors give at the lowest tier amongst Power 5 institutions, and 30% give at the lowest tier amongst the other schools in the sample. With 30% of donors giving at the lowest tier and an average of 8 giving levels, the minimum giving level is likely the largest tier. This emphasizes the critical need for development organizations to understand this initial donor group. There was a consistent thread of Power 5 schools having more total donors than the other institutions. Only four schools at the Power 5 level have fewer than 5,000 donors, while 5 of the other schools in the sample had more than 5,000 total donors. The 5 non-Power 5 schools with more than 5,000 donors have few commonalties. All set their minimum gift amount at $100, have 10 or more giving levels, and have seen historical success in their prominent sport. They do not compete in the same conferences.

In terms of staffing, there is a clear trend that Power 5 institutions have more full-time development staff members than the non-Power 5 schools. 17 staff members is the average at the Power 5, while the average number of staff members at the non-Power 5 schools is 3.43. 15 of the non-Power 5 schools have only 1 full-time fundraiser. Of the 39 Power 5 schools in the study, no fundraising organization has less than 8 full-time staff members. Out of the 89 other schools, only 6 fundraising organizations have 8 or higher staff members. Three of these schools are private, so contributions and ticket sales could not be analyzed for commonalities. The highest number of full-time staff members is 44, followed by 42, 39, and 38. After the 4th highest at 38, the next highest is 28. Each of them competes in one of two Power 5 conferences, with one conference bringing in larger contributions and ticket revenue. These four schools were all rated in the top 30 of the Learfield Director' Cup and have all-time win percentages over 0.520 in both

football and men's basketball. The institution with the biggest staff has the highest student enrollment in the study. These variables were not significantly related to the number of donors at the lowest tier, but there may be a relationship between these and number of staff members needed. This institution with largest staff also had by far the most contributions, nearly doubling the contribution amount of second highest institution.

This study uses a hierarchical regression model. Instead of putting in all the variables in at once, four groups of variables were analyzed one group at a time. The result of this was that the first group of variables, conference affiliation, consumed a large portion of the explained variance at 47.6%. McEvoy (2005) found that conference affiliation had a strong influence on athletic contributions, which remained true in this study. The 2005 study looked at schools at the FBS level, while the current study included all of Division I. Conference affiliation explains the most variance in the number of donors at the lowest tier. It is logical that this explains the most variance in this model because conference affiliation is strongly correlated with football success in terms of record, bowl game appearances, and attendance. Being a member of a Power 5 conference like the Southeastern Conference, compared to being a member of a Group of 5 like the Mountain West, or an FCS like the Big South, explains the same amount of the variance as if one was testing the measures of football success in the model. This makes sense because in the SEC or Big Ten, stadiums seat between 70,000 and 100,000 fans, whereas in the Group of 5 or FCS schools, they are seating around 20,000. Schools in the FBS compete for bowl eligibility whereas FCS schools do not. FBS institutions also have a longer history of athletics as well as athletics development.

In McEvoy's 2005 study, the type of institution had a strong influence on athletic contributions. In this study, the institution-related variables accounted for an additional 4.6% of

the explained variance. Type of institution was not statistically significant in the three models that it was used in. Of the institution-related variables, only enrollment was significantly related to number of donors at the lowest tier, but not in the final model.

As mentioned in the literature review, many studies have found a positive relationship between sport success and total athletics contributions (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Daughtrey & Stotlar, 2000; Grimes & Chressanthis, 1994; Howard & Stinson, 2008; Sigelman & Bookheimer, 1983). While this may be true, this study looks at number of donors at the lowest tier as the dependent variable instead of overall athletic contributions. In this study, Learfield Director's Cup and men's basketball all-time win percentage were used as an indicator of sport success. Neither proved significantly related to the number of donors at the lowest giving tier, and only accounted for 0.1% of the variance in the model. This was the only variable group that did not have at least one statistically significant variable when related to the number of donors at the lowest tier. This demonstrates that the lowest tier is not impacted by this variable, but it may become significant when looking at donors that contribute at higher levels.

The development-controlled variables in this study are number of full-time development staff, minimum gift requirement for the lowest tier, and maximum gift amount at the lowest tier. While controlling for the first three variable groups, the development-controlled variables accounted for another 20.8% of the variance in the model. This demonstrates that factors the development office controls have a direct impact on the number of donors in their organization. Development organizations have no control over athletic success or institutional variables, like enrollment or tuition. However, they can decide how many giving tiers to have, at what price level, and how many staff members that they hire. Gaining revenue is so highly emphasized in the world of college sport, but it does not seem that athletic departments are analyzing their own

giving structure through data analysis. In the final model, when controlling for the first three variable groups, the only statistically significant variables are the Big Ten and those development-controlled variables. Focusing on these three factors, number of full-time development staff, minimum gift requirement for the lowest tier, and maximum gift amount at the lowest tier, can lead to more revenue for the organization.

The unstandardized beta coefficient for minimum gift requirement at the lowest tier was -3.944, demonstrating that there is an inverse relationship between minimum gift amount and number of donors at the lowest tier in this model. From this it can be concluded that for every dollar a fundraising organization increases their minimum gift amount, they will lose approximately four donors. For example, a large Power 5 institution has 3,193 donors at the lowest tier, and a minimum giving tier at $100-199. Currently, assuming that all donors are contributing on the low end of the tier, they are raising $319,300 from donations at that level. If they increase this level from $150-249, they will lose approximately 200 donors, leaving them with 2,993 at the minimum level. This model suggests that this school can make a large adjustment of $50 to their lowest tier and bring in $129,650 more than they would at their current level. Another example, a DI No Football institution has 330 donors at their lowest tier of $150-299. If they increase that giving level by even five dollars, they will bring in less money than they currently do. With the inverse relationship between minimum gift amount and number of donors at the lowest tier, it can be assumed that decreasing that gift amount by a dollar would bring in four more donors. At the school in question, a five dollar decrease in the lowest giving level would bring in at least $1,250 additional dollars. With this model, fundraising organizations have the potential to maximize donations to the lowest tier.

The unstandardized beta coefficient for maximum gift amount at the lowest tier was 2.238. This demonstrates that for every dollar increase to the maximum of the minimum gift amount, the organization will gain about two donors in the minimum giving level. This makes sense because as McCardle found in 2009, if a donor's original contribution level is close to the minimum of the next donation level tier, then they are typically willing to donate enough money to qualify for that next tier. When increasing that top restraint of the giving tier, those donors that usually give just enough to be included in the second lowest tier fall back down to the first.

For the addition of 1 full-time fundraising staff member, a fundraising organization will gain approximately 99 donors at the lowest tier. The unstandardized beta coefficient for this variable is 98.503. As an example, inferring that an additional staff member will bring donors at every tier, a fundraising organization at a Power 5 institution has 8 giving levels. For this example, we assume salary of an entry-level fundraiser is $40,000, and that all donors are giving at the lowest contribution amount for their respective level. Under these assumptions, we conclude that this person will bring in the number of donors at each level in the table below. The percentages of the donor base at each tier were assumed. In this example, adding an additional staff member would bring in $536,800 after paying their salary. That is a large return on investment. With this positive relationship in mind, fundraising organization should aggressively hire until they do not see a return on their investment.

Table 3

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Tier 5	Tier 6	Tier 7	Tier 8
Minimum Gift Requirement	$100	$250	$600	$1,200	$2,500	$7,000	$15,000	$25,000
Percentage of Donor Base	30%	25%	16%	10%	8%	6%	4%	1%
New Donors	99	82	53	33	26	20	13	3
New Contributions Generated	$9,900	$20,500	$31,800	$39,600	$65,000	$140,000	$195,000	$75,000

Limitations and Future Research

Though this study did yield significant findings, there were limitations to the research. First, the final regression model did not explain the total variance in number of donors at the lowest giving level, as the R2 value was .731, meaning about 27 percent of the variance was not explained by the model. Additional variables should be explored in the future to see if a model can be determined that explains a higher variance. This study observed the institution, athletic performance, and the fundraising organization, but did not analyze variables reflecting the fan base. Watson (2019) used median individual income in 2018 for the closest Metropolitan Statistical Area and fan support, measured by Twitter followers. One could also add in the number of living alumni to see if that impacts staffing. Additionally, qualitative information about the relationship between fundraiser and donor may explain more of the variance. These were hard to measure in the current study, but a survey or interview method would be practical to understand how development officers communicate with donors, what tools they use to bring in new donors, and their stewardship practices. The researchers do not currently know how fundraising organizations are choosing to develop their pricing strategies or their benefits, or if they are using research to make these decisions, like the studies on donor motivation mentioned above. Surveying donors at the lowest tier about their experiences can lead to uncovering additional variables to include in a future model, but also give real feedback to organizations on how they can improve.

Sample size was also a limitation of the study. There are 357 Division I athletic programs, but only 128 included in this study. Schools were excluded for a variety of reasons, including they did not have a tiered annual fund tied to benefits, they did not have a fundraising unit within the athletic department, or they did not respond to the initial data request from the

researcher. There were 26 Power 5 schools not included in this data set. Three of these institutions the University of Michigan, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Alabama were excluded because they do not have a tiered rewards program tied to benefits. For example, the Golden Gopher Fund at the University of Minnesota gives donors a "Gopher Score" based on current and prior giving, letter winner and alumni status, donating to other University programs, and season ticket purchases. This score is used to rank donors, and the donors can customer customize their donor experience by selecting from an expansive menu of benefits throughout the year. This is approach is drastically different most NCAA Division I Power 5 and FBS institutions. Conference affiliation has a significant impact on number of donors at the lowest tier, therefore the exclusion of these large institutions could lead to different results.

This model concluded that adding a full-time staff member would bring in approximately ninety-nine additional donors at the lowest tier. It is beneficial moving forward to understand this impact across all tiers. A limitation of this study is that only the lowest tier is observed, so it is unknown how hiring another staff member would impact donors at the remaining tiers. It can be inferred that they would bring in donors at those as well, and potentially raise enough money to cover the salary of the new staff member. If the return on investment is worth it, it might make sense to hire additional staff members to bring in new donors.

In their 2008 study, Howard and Stinson indicated a school's most prominent sport has the largest influence on giving. In most cases that sport is football, but when not offered, donors are more influenced by men's basketball success. A limitation of this study is that football success was not included as a measure of athletic performance. Since 18 schools in the data set did not have football, the researchers chose to use basketball success instead. Also, conference

affiliation and measures of football performance were highly correlated. Football is the prominent sport at many of the institutions included, so that could impact the results of the study.

To build on this study, the researchers suggest expanding the study to more institutions. It is possible to receive data from the remaining public institutions utilizing the Freedom of Information Act. Through this request, public schools would be legally obligated to provide fundraising data. Also, it may be beneficial to include only the schools that have Division I football and add football as a measure of athletic performance. Football success and football season ticket sales have been statistically significant in prior studies; therefore, it may be a better metric for athletic performance than men's basketball, and potentially explain more of the variance in donors at the lowest tier. Lastly, it is recommended that this study be expanded to the other tiers. With the data for the number of donors at each giving level for all the schools in the sample, the impact of increasing gift amounts can be assessed at all levels. This would also allow researchers to analyze the percentage of membership at each level and assess their overall pricing strategy. Maximizing the number of donors at each tier could bring in significantly more revenue.

Conclusion

This study's main contribution is determining the possibility of using data to set minimum giving levels. If set appropriately, there is an opportunity to increase revenue within that tier. If the minimum giving level is underpriced, schools are missing out on potential revenue that donors are willing to give. If the minimum gift level is overpriced, it may deter donors from joining their organization. This is crucial because most athletic departments are operating in the red and they rely heavily on annual fund donations to provide student-athlete scholarships. Currently cash contributions are not enough to offset the increasing expenditures

due to the “arms race” and decreasing fan attendance. As schools continue to face financial hardships, athletics departments need to create new revenue streams and improve upon their current ones. In order to maximize revenue to the annual fund, athletic fundraising organizations should strive to price their giving levels based on data.

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